

Activity Shoe Buying Guide

General Guidelines

- Before you go to the store, know your foot type. Perform “wet test” by wetting foot and bearing full weight with one foot on a dark surface. Evaluate your foot according to information below.
- Don’t rush your selection. Look at more than just one pair of shoes. Decide what type of activity you are going to be doing in the shoe and buy a shoe specific to that activity.
- Buy the best new shoe you can afford. (Even though shoes can cost a lot of money, more is not necessarily better – you may be paying for a brand name, trendy colors, or gimmicks).
- Locate a sports shoe store that maintains an excellent reputation in your community and has sales personnel with up-to-date knowledge about appropriate activity shoe wear.
- Try on both the right and left shoes, fit to the largest foot. Choose a pair that fits both feet well while performing the evaluations listed here.
- Try on the shoes when your feet have swollen to their largest size (usually at the end of the day or just after you’ve been active).
- Try on shoes with the socks, inserts, or orthotic devices you plan on wearing during your activity.
- Walk around in the shoes in the store. Try running (strait and zigzag) in the shoes on a non-carpeted surface. Climb stairs if possible. There should be no slippage when you walk or run.
- You should keep the shoe on your foot for 10 minutes to make sure that it remains comfortable.
- The shoes should be **immediately comfortable**. There is no break-in period necessary.
- For proper fit, insoles should be removed if orthotics is used, as well as to clean and replace as necessary. While removed, check the last of the shoe (see shoe anatomy for details).
- The toe box area should be roomy enough to wiggle your toes without hitting the roof of the toe box and there should be ½ inch from the end of the longest toe to the end of the shoe (usually a thumb width). If you’re buying running shoes, it is not uncommon to end up buying a shoe that is up to a whole size larger than what you are used to wearing in other shoes.

Inspecting for Quality Control

- Place the shoes on a flat surface and check the heel from behind at eye level to see that the heel cup is perpendicular to the sole of the shoe. It will align *straight up and down* and not lean inside or outside.
- Pull on the upper part of the shoe and see if it separates from the sole – it should not!
- Feel seams inside to ensure they are smooth, even, and well stitched. Loose threads or extra glue spots are signs of a poorly constructed shoe.
- The lacing area and tongue should be well padded and heel cup should have a padded notch.
- The shoe should be stable from the heel to the ball of the foot area – this is where it should bend.
- Heel cup should be very rigid and inflexible.

The Wet Test

Know Your Foot Type

Normal

Normal Arch
Rolls inward just right

Best Shoe

Stability
AAFES tag: WHITE

Flat (flexible foot)

Flat Arch
Rolls inward too much
 (“Pronator”)

Best Shoe

Motion Control
AAFES tag: RED

High-Arched (rigid foot)

High Arch
Does not roll inward enough
 (“Supinator”)

Best Shoe

Cushioned
AAFES tag: BLUE



How to Compare Two Running Shoes

If you can't decide between two really good pairs of shoes put one brand on your left foot and put the other brand on your right; compare the fit using these simple tests:

- Standing, bend your foot at the ball of the shoe to test the shoe's flexibility. A well fitting shoe will bend where your *foot* bends.
- Standing, with feet together, twist your upper body to the right and then to the left without moving your feet. A well-fitting shoe will not allow your foot to roll or slide much inside the shoe. Repeat this test, this time up on the balls of your feet.
- With the ball of your foot flat on the floor, try to raise your heel out of the shoe. A well-fitting shoe will grip your heel firmly, without rubbing or irritation.
- Walk & run around and evaluate which shoe's arch is more comfortable.

Shoe Care Don'ts

- Don't run in soaked shoes (this causes premature breakdown of overall shoe strength).
- Don't put shoes in the washing machine or dryer. Hand wash with mild soap and water and allow to air dry.
- Don't kick off shoes from the heel while laced (causes premature breakdown of heel counter).
- If you're conditioned enough to run every day, consider alternating shoes – midsoles take longer than 24 hours to fully rebound for maximum cushioning – especially after running in hot weather.

When to Replace a Running Shoe

- Warning: Don't rely entirely upon the appearance of the shoe. Shoes may not appear significantly dirty or worn, but still may need to be replaced!
- Studies show that shoes lose a significant amount of shock absorption after 400-600 miles of wear. Average runners need to replace shoes approximately every six to nine months to minimize risk of injury.
- Replace if outsole is worn through, heel counter is tilted or limber, or crease marks appear in midsole (these are all signs of significant shoe wear).
- Pain while running or persistent pain after running may be attributed to worn out or improper fitting shoes.

Reputable Web Sites

- Shoe lists by foot type: www.aapsm.org, www.runnersworld.com, www.americanrunning.org & each shoe manufacturer has their own .com
- Mail order shoes: www.roadrunnersports.com & www.holabirdsports.com

Shoe Anatomy

- **Outsole:** The outermost bottom part of the sole, which is treaded (usually black). On running shoes the tread is designed for straight-ahead motion. Court shoes and cross trainers have their tread optimized for lateral or side-to-side stability.
- **Midsole:** The portion between the upper and the outer-sole. This is the area whose major contribution to the shoe is shock absorption.
- **Heel Counter:** A rigid piece surrounding the heel that provides greatest stability to the shoe.
- **Insole or sock liner:** This is the liner inside the shoe that has a bit of an arch and usually some shock absorbing material incorporated into it.
- **Last:** The template upon which the shoe is built. A combination last (board & sewn stitches) is generally best. (Pull out liner – board last should go to ball of foot area – the rest is stitching.)
- **Upper:** The uppermost part of the shoe. This part encompasses your foot and has the laces.